Global Integration -- Maintaining a Competitive Advantage

Partial transcript of remarks delivered Oct. 30, 2018 by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph F. Dunford, Jr. to Joint Staff personnel at the Pentagon

…I want to talk to you about…where we are and where we need to be relative to adapting to today's strategic environment. And there are some significant things that we need to think about. All of you are familiar with the National Defense Strategy, National Military Strategy. Raise your hand if you're not. (Laughter.) All right. At least you're awake for the first – the J5 just raised his hand. All right. Forget about the rest of the afternoon. (Laughter.) But you know that the strategy lays out the challenges we face today – Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, violent extremism. And something that I say when I speak externally is that, you know, Henry Kissinger called this the most complex and volatile period of our history since World War II. And I think you'd have to say that's probably true.

And if you – if you look at what really the National Defense Strategy says, it says that things have changed in some pretty fundamental ways. First is this idea of great power competition. What does that mean? Well, if you think about the end of the Cold War, from the end of the Cold War, 1989-1990, till just a few years ago, we had no peer competitor. We had no hot breath on the back of our neck. We had a decided advantage over anybody. The second – so that's the first thing, great power competition. And now we have two competitors, China and Russia. The second thing is from a military perspective, you know, we had a decided competitive advantage over any potential adversary. What does that mean? That means that we, the United States, could project power when and where we needed to around the world. We wouldn't be contested very much. And we could operate freely across all domains. And I think you could say that with absolute certainty – again, relatively uncontested – from 1990, you know, probably till, again, just a few years ago.

The third thing you could say when you look at the strategy is that relative to the requirements, the inventory of the force we have today is stressed, it's challenged, it's not adequate to meet all the requirements that we may have to execute the National Defense Strategy, National Military Strategy. Again, if you go back to the 1990s, and we took all the combatant commanders' requirements, on a day-to-day basis we were probably shacking a target at about 80 or 90 percent of what they said they needed. We were probably able to provide it to them in that strategic environment. Today there's many parts of the joint force where we're meeting 10, 15, 20 percent, 30 percent of the combatant commanders' requirements on a day-to-day basis. I could point out to the intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance enterprise as one example, counterintelligence is another. Those are two issues we've touched probably in the last 10 days. And there are many others. So our inventory is not what we would want it to be to meet the requirements.

And then the fourth thing I want to highlight to you is that the character of war has changed. And people say that all the time. And many of you are familiar with the words that are in the documents, say any fight that we'd be is, in all likelihood, going to be transregional, cuts across multiple combatant commands. And any fight that we're going to be in will involve all domains – sea, air, land, space, and cyberspace. But let me give you a 1990s example and a 2018 example, just so we're all clear on what we're doing. And I'm going to just kind of – I'm just

setting the conditions here a little bit, and then I'm going to ask each – a number of the senior leaders to come up and share in their lane how we're adapting. I'm giving you the reason why I feel like we needed to make some changes.

But if you think about the Korean Peninsula, which has been much in the news over the past two years, in the 1990s if a conflict broke out on the peninsula a couple of things. One, we would have assumed that it was a sea, an air, and a land battle. It would have been isolated largely to the Korean Peninsula. And the commander of the United States Forces Korea, Combined Forces Korea, United Nations Command – that's the same individual, today it's General Brooks – that individual would be the supported commander. And virtually the entire joint force – those of us back here on the Joint Staff, DOD – would all be looking at General Brooks and saying: What do you need? And we would be flowing forces to meet his requirements, in the 1990s.

Today, if a conflict broke out on the peninsula, the first leader I'm going to talk to is not General Brooks. It's probably going to be General O'Shaughnessy at Northern Command. And make sure that we're where we need to be in terms of protecting the homeland. The second phone call is probably going to be to General Nakasone of the United States Cyber Command to make sure that we're shields up in cyberspace. The third call I'm going to make is probably General Hyten to talk about where are we with regard to the nuclear enterprise, because we're dealing with a challenge that has nuclear implications. The fourth call I'm going to call is probably going to be Admiral Davidson to say: Hey, where are we in terms of executing the defense of Japan and setting the conditions in the Pacific so we have a secure platform from which to project power onto the peninsula? And eventually I'll make my way onto General Brooks and find out what he needs.

And I'm exaggerating to make a point here in terms of the difference between what was going on in the 1990s and what's going on today. And who thinks that that would be occurring in isolation at any point? See, if it happens today, it's happening in the context of what's going on vis-à-vis Russia. It's happening in the context of what's going on in the Middle East. It's happening with violent extremism still being the threat that it is, and then the broader threats in the Pacific. So it's not going to be an isolated case, which means a couple things. One, think about the complexity of command and control. So instead of having one single commander where everybody is oriented towards supporting that commander, if the secretary of defense has a VTC and has all his commanders there, he's going to be listening simultaneously to General Scaparrotti talk about what are the challenges in Europe, General Votel's going to talk about what's going on in CENTCOM and what he's doing to deal with violent extremism and to deter Iran. He'd be talking to General Waldhauser about the challenges of violent extremism ongoing in Africa right now. He'd be – and I think you get the point.

All of those commanders would be there. All of them would have requirements. And the secretary of defense, in that environment – in other words, a challenge on the peninsula, and yet operations ongoing globally simultaneously. He has to make decisions in that environment at the speed of relevance. So that's a much more complex problem than it might have been in the 1990s. Again, a transregional, all-domain fight and decision-making in that environment. The second thing is, if we broke glass and we pulled out the plans that we had in the 1990s, we would have pulled out a plan for operations on the peninsula. The planning effort that would have taken place prior to a war breaking out on the peninsula wouldn't have helped us much think our

way through how do we mitigate the challenges in Europe, in the Middle East, in Africa, simultaneous to a conflict going on on the peninsula. So the plans and the process that we have might have been inadequate.

In terms of resourcing, I already told that, you know, we don't have sufficient resources to be where we want to be in the right numbers every place we would want to be, from a combatant commander's perspective. So setting the globe in accordance with our strategic priorities and making sure we have the right posture to reinforce Korea, even as we deal with all these other challenges, is something we got to think about. And then the last piece has a little bit more to do with the future, and it's on force development and force design. The other characteristic of the 1990s is we had sufficient resources and – again, relative to the threat we had sufficient resources to build capabilities and expect that we would have a competitive advantage. But something has happened since the 1990s. Russia and China, they watched us in Desert Storm and they watched how we projected power. They watched in 2003. And I think you all know, for more than a decade they have looked at what they perceive to be our vulnerabilities, and they have developed capabilities across all domains that are designed specifically to disrupt our ability to project power and to operate freely across all domains.

So what I'm suggesting to you is that not change for change's sake, not just because we had a good leadership team come in a couple years ago, not because the processes in the 1990s were broken. They were appropriate to the strategic environment within which we found ourselves in the 1990s. What I'm suggesting to you is because the strategic landscape has changed in such fundamental ways – again, great power competition, competitive advantage had eroded, relative inventory of capabilities compared to what capacities we need, and then the character of war changing. What I'm suggesting to you is that the implications for how we make decisions, how we prioritize and allocate the force, how we do planning, and how we develop the force today and design the force for tomorrow, all has to change because the consequences of not changing are a lack of competitive advantage in the future. And as some of you may have heard me say in testimony every year, one of the expressions I use every year is American men and women should never find themselves in a fair fight. They should never find themselves in a fair fight. And so our job is to make sure that we do have a decided competitive advantage, not just today but in the future.

And so what we're going to talk about this afternoon are the ways – OK? And by the way, we'll have some time – I don't want to take too much time now because I want to make sure we get through it. We'll have some time at the end. And I'll take questions. I don't care if we have a debate about how we adapt to the environment that I just spoke about. But it's very important that we all agree we have to adapt. And that's important. And it's not just because we want to change the parking spaces, the work stations, create cross-functional teams, and make everybody – dislocate everybody's daily routine. It's because a failure to adapt will make us irrelevant. A failure to adapt will mean we will not have a competitive advantage in the future. And those four fundamental ways – fundamental areas are the areas within which I judge we have to adapt.

And so we're going to transition now. And we're going to spend a few minutes about how we're adapting. We're going to talk about the changes that we're making in planning. We're going to talk a little bit about the change we're making in force development and force design. We're going to talk a little bit about how we employ the force on a day-to-day basis differently today

than we did in the past to accommodate those fundamental changes that I outlined. And I'd just ask you to think through this as the briefs go on. And then at the end we'll have a little bit of a conversation. And you can challenge – and I mean this; this is a team effort – you can challenge anything I've said or question anything I've said about the fundamental changes in the strategic landscape.

If there's a point that you want me to clarify or address, we'll do that. And then, trust me, over the next couple years people have better ideas on the way that we're approaching this and the methods of addressing these challenges, as long as we all agree on the reason why we're changing it and we all agree on the end state, how we get there is going to be a team effort. And I need each one of you to have – to be engaged in that – in that effort. None of us individually are going to be able to solve these challenges. They are significant. But I have a very high degree of confidence that with the quality of people we have here today – and those of you who I've spoken to in smaller groups know I say this all the time. I've been around a long time. I've been on a lot of staffs. And I say without hesitation, with all confidence, and not just because you're here, that this is the best staff I've ever been on – the Joint Staff. And this is the third time I've been on the Joint Staff.

And the reason is because the services give us the very best people that they have. And they give us people that are absolutely experts in virtually any part of the force. And then the quality of civilians that we attract on the joint force is also reflected in the overall quality of the staff. So with the quality of people that we have, I don't have any question that we can overcome these challenges. But I don't want you to understate the nature of these challenges or understate the need for us to make some fundamental changes. That has to occur. And the people that will be here five or seven years from now, and the chairman probably after next, expects that we're doing these things, because I can say today – and I want to leave you with this thought. I can say today that we can meet all of our alliance commitments and we can protect the homeland. I can say that with absolute confidence. I can say that we can meet our – I can say that we have a competitive advantage over any potential adversary. And I can say that with absolute confidence.

I can also tell you that if we don't make some fundamental changes, that five or seven years from now – and perhaps even less than five or seven years from now, we won't be able to say that we can project power when and where necessary to advance our interests. And we won't say that we've set the conditions for the joint force to operate freely across all domains. That's what we're trying to do. That's, at the end of the day, what we're talking about here. We're talking about the ability of our nation to project power when and where necessary to advance our interests. What does that do? Deters potential adversaries and puts us in a position to respond if deterrence fails, and then operate freely across all domains, which is to give our men and women in uniform a competitive advantage, and make sure they're not in a fair right. Just say fixated on that as we – as we think about how we're going to get there.

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